Hill Panel Faults FBI on

Associated Press

The House assassinations committee indicated yesterday it has found evidence showing that James Earl Ray's brothers may have been involved in the murder of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Committee counsel G. Robert Blakey listed a series of circumstantial connections that he said add up to a "family-based association that points to a criminal relationship . . . ." among Ray and his two brothers, John and Jerry.

Blakey said the FBI failed to adequately investigate a possible conspiracy in the April 4, 1968, killing of the civil rights leader, although evidence that someone other than Ray was involved was available.

"The evidence indicates that the performance of the FBI, as well as the Justice Department, was flawed," Blakey said in releasing a 106-page report on the FBI investigation.

Cartha DeLoach, a senior FBI official at the time of the assassination, defended the investigation and said he remains convinced that King was killed by one man acting alone.

"There is no conclusive evidence developed by the committee that there was a conspiracy," said DeLoach, who was a close aide to the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

King was killed by a rifleman as he stepped from his room at a Memphis, Tenn., motel. Ray was arrested two months later in London and is serving a 99-year prison term for the murder.

Ray first confessed, but then recanted, saying he was framed by a mysterious figure named "Raoul."

Blakey said a two-year re-examination of the FBI investigation showed an intensive

Probe of Ray Brothers

effort to identify the trigger man and then locate and arrest him. Until Ray's capture, there also was a concerned effort to uncover any possible conspiracy, Blakey said.

But once Ray was in custody, Blakey said, the FBI probe tailed off dramatically with only intermittent efforts to find out if anyone else was involved.

"The FBI never made a concerted effort to check the possibility of a Ray family conspiracy in the assassination," Blakey said. "Instead, it treated the brothers and other relatives almost solely as information sources as to [James Earl Ray's] whereabouts."

Blakey recalled the publicly known feud between King and Hoover and FBI efforts to discredit King.

DeLoach denied that the Hoover-directed campaign of wiretaps and dirty tricks against King contributed to his assassination.

In reply, Blakey asked DeLoach, "Would you change your position if I were to tell you that the committee has developed evidence that the circle of people who may have plotted the death of Dr. King was in fact touched by FBI propaganda efforts?"

DeLoach answered he has seen no facts to indicate either that a conspiracy to kill King existed or that the FBI bears any responsibility for his death. He said virtually all of the FBI's attempts to discredit King by spreading stories about him proved ineffective and expressed doubt that any would have influenced a potential assassin.

Blakey later refused to elaborate on his reference to a possible conspiracy.

There are tentative plans to call John and Jerry Ray to testify before the committee. They could not be reached for comment yesterday.